

No. 6
SPRING Issue

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Science

Fiction

QUARTERLY

THE SHADOW GIRL

**An Absorbing
Book-Length Novel**

by

RAY CUMMINGS

ALSO

CECIL CORWIN

PAUL DENNIS LAVOND



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6

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1942

Science Fiction

QUARTERLY

ONE OF MR. CUMMINGS' MOST FAMOUS NOVELS

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Out of the misty realms of time came the strange tower and with it, a man and a lovely girl, seeking vengeance on one who dwelt in our own epoch. Here is a novel which will grip you with its strangeness, its cosmic scope, and fantastic, yet real action.

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MISSION

*It would be so easy to conquer
these primitive creatures . . .*

THE cylinder stood on the edge of a grassy plain. It was enveloped in a shimmering nimbus of golden brilliance. Lying grotesquely crumpled before the cylinder was a strange, alien figure—unmoving. . . . A little distance away was another figure, also crumpled and still, but more human-like in appearance. Fifty yards beyond began a deep forest.

Aside from the occasional murmuring breeze that rustled the grass there was no sound or movement to disturb the tableau. And the stillness made it all the more mysterious.

KRAI landed on the edge of the forest. His search for intelligent life had been unfruitful up to now. But as he passed over the forest he had seen what he was looking for. A village of tree-dwellers.

Equipping himself with a portable pressure projector, Krai let himself out through the air-lock and stepped for the first time to the surface of earth. The air-lock's outer seal—a cumbrous affair over three feet thick—swung automatically back into place behind him and, as it did, a shimmering nimbus of brilliant golden light enveloped the space ship.

Krai experienced some difficulty in accustoming himself to the heavier gravitational pull of the new planet at first. But this was short-lived.

As he moved over the plain toward the forest, Krai cut a strange figure. He was small and squat, barely four feet high; his body tri-

angular-shaped and tapering to a truncated point at the top. Three thin tentacular legs supported the trunk and provided locomotion. Four equally thin and powerful appendages were attached to the upper part of the trunk, two on the chest and one on each side of the hardly visible head. Each of Krai's two large eyes was embedded in the end of a foot-long stalk, giving him highly maneuverable and easily concentrated vision in all directions. Several spiracles dotted the lower part of the head, on each side of which was a huge ear—nature's answer to the problem of his own world's thin atmosphere.

In the denser air of the earth these latter proved very useful, if a trifle disconcerting with their powers of magnification. He could distinguish the slightest sounds at tremendous distances. The patter of an animal's feet deep in the forest; the noise of a falling branch.

In places the forest was quite thick and the going sometimes difficult, but for the most part the journey was uneventful. Presently he began to catch the sounds of movement and voices.

Krai approached warily. He realized that these people were still very primitive, had not even begun to walk on the ground. Up to now he had exercised overmuch caution because he hadn't known what to expect, but now he knew there was nothing to fear.

Detaching his pressure projector from the equipment secured to his back, Krai advanced on the alert.

His job was by no means an easy one, despite the fact that everything seemed to be working in with his plans. If he were discovered, disaster could still wreck those selfsame plans.

He paused. Through the concealing foliage he looked out upon a small clearing. In the trees surrounding this were the houses of the arboreal community and, singly and in groups, chattering gibberish to each other, its inhabitants.

THEY were outlandish-looking beings to Krai, just as he would have been to them. Nearly twice as tall as he and powerful with the strength of the brute. Few of them wore any covering, but the plentiful hair on their bodies seemed to be ample covering of itself. Communication was carried on with a combination of grunts and gestures and as far as Krai could make out the articulate part was very limited in meaning; almost incomprehensible to an intelligent mind.

So far they hadn't detected the presence of another, but the alien knew he must not tarry.

Moving into the shelter of two thick tree boles, Krai brought his pressure projector into play. The large communal house suddenly appeared to smash in upon itself, as though crushed by a giant hand. Screams of agony issued from the splintered walls as it crashed to earth. The tree-dwellers stopped everything they were doing to gaze in stupefaction at this prodigy. But before they could voice their amazement, another structure shattered under the emanation from the pressure projector. As the ray was invisible, it appeared to the thunder-struck denizens as though some angry, unseen demon were venting his displeasure

upon the village. Instinctively, a large crowd banded together for mutual protection. This was what Krai had been waiting for. They were annihilated.

Those who still lived fled. But Krai's implacable destruction sought them out and none got far before they were caught.

When the alien emerged from his place of concealment, all that remained of the village was a few heaps of shattered pulp. He had done his job well.

AS KRAI retraced his steps through the forest, his thoughts were far away. They reached back across the millions of miles of emptiness he had traversed to come here, back to his own people. They had been doomed; extinction facing them from over-population and lack of water. Mars was nearing the end, and its mighty race seemed about to share the fate of their planet, when a ray of hope came to them. The long-forgotten secret of interplanetary travel had been rediscovered. It was as a straw to the dying man.

And Mars clutched at it. A small space rocket was built with all speed. Earth, long eyed with anticipation by believers in the practicality of flight between the worlds, was chosen as the objective. Krai, an acknowledged expert in atmospheric travel and the problems confronting a space traveler, found himself selected to make the voyage. His job was to discover whether the Earth was suitable for Martian settlement, or if it could be made so. Astronomical observation had made this fairly certain, however, and that part of his task was merely one of confirmation. But he was also to ascertain whether there was any intelligent life upon

the world. If this proved to be the case and the opportunity presented itself, he was to wipe it out. It was ruthless, of course, but the Martians were facing death themselves and had to be ruthless. They couldn't take a chance on being attacked by Earth's inhabitants before they were accustomed to the new conditions and could fight back without being at a disadvantage.

The Martian felt a deep satisfaction as he made his way back to his space ship. There might still remain much to be done, but there was no doubt in his mind about the future now—a bright future and long, new life for Mars . . .

But Krai might have felt very differently had he seen the hate-filled eyes that pursued his retreating figure. One of the brute-men of the arboreal community had been absent on a private hunting expedition when the Martian began hostilities, only returning in time to see the demon (as Krai appeared to the savage mind) leaving the scene of destruction.

The tree-dweller's first thought was of his mate. But prudence dictated that he remain concealed till the retreating form of the demon disappeared among the trees. Then he searched frantically for his mate. Eventually he found her—crushed among the splinters of their tree-house.

A terrible, burning hate took hold of the savage. An all-consuming hate overcame his instinctive fear of the demon-thing he had seen. Thoughts of revenge crowded all else from his mind.

Then, with quick resolve, the tree-man took to the trees in pursuit of the demon. His hyper-sharp sense of smell soon enabled him to pick up the trail of his quarry. Presently the forest began to thin out, giving way

to open plain. Nearing the edge of the trees, the eagle eyes detected movement, then the grotesquely alien figure of the demon-thing came into view. Krai was in the open now. With a spurt of speed, accelerated by white-hot hate, the pursuer reached the edge of the forest—too late.

THE Martian was nearly to his ship. Another moment and he would be safe. The brute-man hated the ground and feared the incredible powers of the demon-thing too much to risk physical combat. There was only one chance.

Whipping a huge, jagged-edged stone from his girdle, the tree-dweller hurled it with all the energy of his tremendous thews. With deadly accuracy the stone shot through the air. Krai never knew what hit him; his brain-case was shattered like an egg-shell. He dropped in his tracks.

His desire for revenge satisfied, the tree-dweller began to comprehend the magnitude of his feat. Single-handed, he had killed the demon-thing that destroyed his people! For a moment he was a little dizzy with the enormity of it.

Then, attracted by the golden glow of the big cylinder, the brute-man forgot all else to investigate this new miracle. He was confident in his ability to deal with anything that arose now and the shimmering beauty of the golden emanation intrigued him.

He reached out tentatively. As the hirsute hand passed through the nimbus a look of startled surprise appeared on the face of the tree-dweller.

Then he collapsed. As the limp hand broke contact with the brilliance surrounding the space ship there was an almost perceptible crackle of energy. And for a moment the acrid pungence of ozone hung in the air.